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**Mind the Gap? Gender Equality and Civil Sphere in Africa:  
Analysis of Policy Discourse on the Beijing Declaration  
2003-15**

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**Mind the Gap? Civil Society Policy Engagement and the Pursuit of Gender Justice: Critical  
Discourse Analysis of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in  
Africa 2003-15**

**Abstract**

This paper presents critical discourse analysis of state and civil society organizations’ efforts to implement the gender mainstreaming goals set out in the United Nations’ Beijing Declaration. It is argued that the latter represents a generational opportunity to apply Feminist Political Economic Framework to development in Africa. Yet, by drawing on the ‘complementarity conjecture’ in governance theory, this study shows how current practice falls short of the sought-after participative democratic model of mainstreaming whereby politicians attempt to cope with complexity by engaging civil society in policy formulation, thereby strengthening input legitimacy and policy efficacy. Instead, the findings reveal statistically-significant differences in state and CSOs’ policy framing, issues over conceptual clarity and a disjuncture in the prioritization of key gendered issues such as poverty, economic inequality and conflict resolution. This matters because it indicates that the capacity of the civil sphere to act as a political arena from whence NGOs may challenge the traditionally male-dominated power structures is being undermined by a ‘disconnect’ between state and civil society as they pursue contrasting agendas.

**Key Words:** Women, Gender, Equality, Civil Society, Discourse

## Introduction

This paper makes an original contribution to contemporary understanding of efforts to promote gender equality in Africa. It presents critical frame analysis of state and civil society organizations' policy discourse on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), a pioneering global initiative launched by the United Nations in 1995. This focus matters because deep-set patterns and processes of gender discrimination, oppression and inequality continue to beset societies across Africa (Fonjong 2001; Egbe Orock 2007; Olowu 2012; Rohrs et al 2014). Thus, the ensuing analysis makes a timely contribution to understanding what, from a global perspective, is a generational opportunity to advance gender justice through the most extensive UN- sponsored equality project to date; one involving no less than 180+ international state signatories. Thus the Beijing Declaration advances a participative, democratic model of gender mainstreaming. The core aim of which is to embed gender equality concerns into all stages of the policy process (cf. Woodward 2008). It is a goal that is consistent with feminist political economy (Rai and Waylen, 2014) and a 'governance approach' to securing gender-equal societies in the twenty-first century. This perspective underlines that, far from being a top-down, imposed political 'project', progress depends upon effective engagement and co-working between the state and civil society. As Rai (2002, p.183) observes, 'the relationship between political institutions and civil society thus becomes an important arena for negotiations and struggles... allowing for another set of possibilities for struggles around the domain of reform'.

'Civil society' here is defined as associational activities involving the family, non-governmental organisations, pressure groups, charities, community groups, social movements and campaigning organisations (Gramsci 1971; Keane 1988). Notably, the state-civil society co-working aspired to in the Beijing Declaration is consistent with the 'complementarity conjecture' in governance theory (Klijn and Skelcher, 2008). This emphasises how politicians attempt to cope with

complexity by using civil society networks to increase involvement in policy formulation, thus not only strengthening input legitimacy but also policy efficacy through the pursuit of shared ‘cognitive maps’ for action.

The BDPfA is explicit in its requirement that state signatories secure: ‘the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy’ (UN 1995, Article 20). In the two decades since Beijing, this goal has been restated in an extensive range of policies and treaties, including the African Union Gender Policy Plan of Action: ‘women continue to be outside the decision making sphere and barely enjoy human rights. Progress must be made through fruitful dialogue between civil society and governments, backed by political will, reflecting in changing constitutional, legal and social platforms, through which more women can exercise voice and accountability in decision-making that affects their well-being’ (African Union 2009a, 3). In response, governments across the continent have espoused engagement with civil society (Samuel 2001; Sender 2002; African Union 2009b),

Notwithstanding the pivotal role of African civil society in mainstreaming and ‘exerting pressure on the state and the ruling elite for positive socio-political and economic change’ (Makumbe 1998, 316), hitherto there has not been systematic analysis of how political elites and civil society organisations (CSOs) formulate and frame their response to the post-Beijing agenda. This matters because of what is termed ‘frame-alignment’ in the policy literature (Snow et al, 1988). This notion points to the way that the probability of successful collaborative policy implementation increases at the point at which the frames of key policy actors – such as government and civil society - are aligned (‘frame resonance’). The absence of understanding of this aspect of the formative phase of policy implementation in relation to the post-Beijing agenda is a key knowledge-gap. One that is pivotal to future policy success. In response, this study uses critical discourse analysis of a rich data set consisting of hundreds of UN monitoring reports. Collectively these constitute a ‘yardstick

to monitor the realisation of the human rights of women' (Tomasevski 2000, 234). This constitutes a transferrable mixed methodology designed to facilitate international comparative analysis of the formative phase of policy implementation. It is one suited to revealing the contrasts and commonalities in political vision, understandings and approach of governments and CSOs in relation to the BDPfA. In summary, this study's principal research aims are: 1. To apply critical discourse analysis with reference to spatial and temporal patterns in framing and salience of different policy issues and priorities and; 2. to explore contrasts and commonalities in state and CSO discourse on the implementation of the BPDfA.

As the ensuing discussion reveals, the significance of the analysis lies in showing how, whilst mainstreaming may represent a generational opportunity to apply Feminist Political Economic Framework to development in Africa, current practice in falls short of the sought-after participative democratic model. Instead of strengthening input legitimacy and policy efficacy, the findings reveal statistically-significant differences in state and CSOs' framing, issues over conceptual clarity and a disjuncture in the prioritization of key gendered issues such as poverty, economic inequality and conflict resolution. Crucially, the interplay of state-CSO divergence and issues of legitimation and performativity combine to diminish the capacity of the civil sphere to act as a political arena from whence NGOs may challenge the traditionally male-dominated power structures of state and society in Africa today.

Accordingly, the remainder of the paper is structured thus: following an overview of the feminist political economy, civil society and gender equality; the methodology is summarised. Next, the discourse analysis is presented in three parts: 1. state discourse on the implementation of the Beijing declaration (including the role of civil society organisations), 2. Civil society organisations' discourse on the implementation of the Beijing declaration, and 3. Comparative analysis of state-civil society discourse. The principal findings and their significance are restated and discussed in the conclusion.

**Feminist Political Economy: Civil Society, Gender and Change in Africa**

Writing in RoAPE over two decades ago, Carolyn Baylies and Janet Bujra (1993, 5) underlined the potential of feminist political economy (FPE) to understanding gender inequality:

Women have been shown to be marginalised within the economy and the political sphere while exhausting themselves through their productive and reproductive contributions. Their disadvantaged situation defines a set of needs requiring attention. But to the extent that these needs are bound up with structured inequality, the basis of that inequality must also draw scrutiny. Much of the hardship suffered by many African women follows from their disadvantaged material situation as dictated by economic structures and relations... the situation of women must be understood not just in terms of the structures of capitalism, but also in terms of... the necessity of transforming gender relations.

In definitional terms the feminist political economic framework: ‘reveals and clarifies how gender determines or influences the social and political relationships and structures of power... this implies, naturally, a more holistic approach to economics and to community development and capacity building. It implies, as well, an emphasis on *social definitions of what it means to be a human being*, rather than merely economic definers and qualifiers’ (Inter Pares 2004, 4, emphasis added). In this regard there is clear, albeit hitherto under-explored, consistency with a foundational principle of gender mainstreaming, namely, ‘*treating the individual as a whole person*’ (Rees 2005, 565). In this respect, as with FPE, mainstreaming is concerned with ‘visioning’ – or ‘seeking to identify how



existing systems and structures, however inadvertently, may be androcentric in terms of their design and who benefits' (p. 568).

Notably, as Bezanson and Luxton (2006, 3) observe, 'embedded in the feminist political economy framework, social reproduction offers a basis for understanding how various institutions (such as the state, the market, the family/ household, and *the third sector*) interact and balance power so that the work involved in the daily and generational production and maintenance of people is completed' (emphasis added). In other words, FPE is concerned with advancing a holistic governance perspective of the interaction between society and economy ways that critique gender relations and promote women's rights and empowerment. In this regard also, there is a strong overlap with the participative democratic model of gender mainstreaming. The latter places emphasis on involving those targeted by mainstreaming initiatives in both the design and delivery of policy (Barnett Donaghy 2004). At this point, it should be noted that, as the core concept at the heart of the Beijing Declaration, gender mainstreaming - has not escaped critical analysis (cf. Squires 2005, Mosesdottir and Erlingsdottir 2005). However, full engagement with such theory-oriented critiques is outwith the present purposes. Rather, the current concern is with the implementation of mainstreaming – or what, in historical terms, is the largest and most significant international initiative to promote gender justice across African states.

In exploring the implementation of mainstreaming the present focus on the state-civil society nexus is apposite because, as Debusscher and Van der Vleuten (2012, 326) observe, participative 'mainstreaming is *constructed, articulated and transformed through discourse*. Policy-makers carry the responsibility to push [...] equality further by involving civil society and individual activists promoting [...] equality' (emphasis added). Participative mainstreaming thus aligns with contemporary theorising on governance (Rhodes 2007). Notably, as captured in Klijn and Skelcher's 'complementarity conjecture'. This emphasises that governance networks comprised of civil society organisations:



Provide democratic institutions with additional linkages to society... representative democracy can co-exist with deliberative and participative democracy introduced through governance networks... Politicians try to cope with complexity by using networks to increase involvement in policy formulation, thus strengthening input legitimacy (Klijn and Skelcher 2008, 7).

Given its centrality to both FPE and mainstreaming, it is worth reflecting on the term ‘civil society’. It denotes the realm of dialogue and human relations that is connected to, but distinct from, the state, markets and the personal or familial sphere (Keane 1988, Cohen and Arato 1994, Edwards 2009). It is a social arena that is of pivotal significance to understanding contemporary gender relations because of its potential to: challenge the largely male-dominated character of state institutions, and act as a source of pluralism and solidarity around norms of equality and rights (Alexander 1998); promote civility (Alexander 2005, 652); and be a locus for rights and recognition (Fraser 1998). It thus constitutes a key social and political space wherein CSOs seek to advocate, politicize and provide services for women through representation and gendered claims-making whilst remaining cognizant of a history of marginalisation and oppression (Pascall and Lewis 2004).

The commonality between FPE and gender mainstreaming is not limited the foregoing institutional and governance factors. It is also reflected in the way that the values underpinning a Feminist Political Economic Framework (Riley, 2008) map directly onto mainstreaming principles (Rees, 2005) (Figure 1.). In this regard the present study makes an original contribution for, hitherto, the academic literature has not fully considered the interplay between the FPE and mainstreaming. In addressing this, it responds to William’s (2004, 574) rejoinder that political economy and the study of Africa ‘need[s] to combine different approaches to interpreting the layered forms of gender relations. We fetter our explanations by confining them to the tramlines of *a priori* theories and can best advance them by adopting a methodological pluralism’. Moreover, as Peterson (2005, 514) observes: ‘strategically, some feminists advocate... gender mainstreaming [and state engagement

via] women-oriented non-governmental organisations... While most feminists recognise the need for and support these strategies, some also question their efficacy in terms of securing systemic gains for women and/or transforming structural conditions that reproduce hierarchies not only of gender but class, race, sexuality and nationality... [this is] key to understanding the state of debate regarding gendered political economy'. The current focus thus engages with these debates and informs an understanding of policy efficacy and whether, in the pursuit of gender mainstreaming, state and civil society policy discourse is characterised by complementary or conflictual 'cognitive maps' for action.

[Temporary Note – Figure 1. – about here]

Not only is civil society's role in advancing the shared themes and values of FPE and mainstreaming explicit in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – it is restated in a series of UN conventions and resolutions (e.g. CEDAW, SCR1325, SCR1888, SCR1889), as well as Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, and Article 18 of the African Charter for Human and People's Rights (The Banjul Charter – 'the State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman'). The present analysis will thus provide an assessment of whether, as UNECA (2013, 7) asserts, 'civil society, or at least parts of it, [has been] strengthened... [and it has] gained confidence and experience participating in the political process... civil society activists have replaced the old guard. [it is a] rejuvenation of pluralism in Africa [that] has had positive results'. Or, whether a contrary view - such as that advanced by Gyimah-Boadi (1996, 118) pertains: 'serious deficiencies that sap [CSOs'] effectiveness as key agents in the long and difficult process of democratic consolidation... [they are] highly vulnerable to repression and co-optation by the state... Civil society's weakness as a force for democratic consolidation is most glaring in the crucial area of ensuring public accountability'.

Against this backdrop, the codifying of women’s rights in the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Banjul Charter can be seen as emblematic of the multi-dimensional struggle over gender equity that has taken place in Africa over the past twenty years. It is a fight for gender equity that raises broad questions of power (Prah 2013) and class (Saul 2010), as well as how to address economic and fiscal crisis (Johnston-Anumonwo and Doane 2011) and the growing dependency of the African nation state, its increasing de-legitimisation and resort to the use of force (Dunn 2009, Kagwanja 2009, Kay 2011). It is the combination of these socio-economic challenges; participative democratic mainstreaming’s imperative of civil society engagement; and the shared values, themes and tropes of Feminist Political Economy and mainstreaming – that collectively provide both context and analytical framework for the following analysis.

**Methodology**

This study combines qualitative and quantitative analysis of critical discourse analysis and issue-salience. The former centres on policy ‘framing’ – or the use of language. As Creed et al (2002, 37) explain; frames can be viewed as ‘a necessary property of a text—where text is broadly conceived to include discourses, patterned behaviour, and systems of meaning, policy logics, constitutional principles, and deep cultural narratives’. In the present study frames in the BDPfA texts were coded twice. Once using an inductive coding schemata (Joffe and Yardley 2003) based on key frames taken from the BDPfA (including: ‘equality’, ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘rights’, ‘discrimination/ oppression’, ‘partnership/ cooperation’, and ‘mainstreaming’) - and again according to policy issue (health, economic status, raising children/ family life, education, trafficking/ prostitution, gender-based violence, genital mutilation, peace/ conflict resolution, property rights/ inheritance).

Frame use was quantified by drawing upon the notion of 'issue-salience'. This measures the level of attention to a given topic or frame amongst competing issues and agendas in the discourse. It is determined by content analysis (Krippendorff and Bock 2008) – or the frequency of key words, ideas or meanings in policy documents. This was done by adapting a procedure derived from electoral studies, whereby texts are divided into 'quasi-sentences' (or, 'an argument which is the verbal expression of one political idea or issue,' Volkens, 2001, 96). Dividing sentences in this manner controls for long sentences that contain multiple policy ideas.

To operationalise the mixed methodology electronic versions of the policy documents (African states' Beijing +10 and +20 reports, and CSO reports) were analysed using appropriate software.<sup>1</sup> The sampling frame was a stratified random sample of forty state reports in the UN Beijing +10 (2005) and Beijing +20 reviews (2014/15) drawn from across the UN's five sub-regions of Africa (East, West, Central, Southern, and North) – and, a stratified random sample of 100 CSO annual reports submitted to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. To increase reliability both phases of coding (i.e. frames and policy areas) were repeated by a research assistant. This revealed a limited number of discrepancies. In total 15 incidences were identified (under one per cent) these were resolved through discussion between coders.

### **State Discourse on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2003-14**

Frame analysis of state parties' Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reports for the 2005 and 2015 reviews reveals a number of concerns and issues. Before considering each below, the main findings may be summarised as follows: analysis shows there is an over-reliance on discursive 'soft' rights as opposed to legally-enforceable 'hard' rights – as well as use of outdated affirmative action policy interventions. When the two reviews (2005 and 2014/15) are compared there are also worrying and significant shifts in policy framing. Notably, the downplaying 'participation' is a major concern, as is the marked decline in attention to gender and economic inequality. A further issue is

geographical inconsistency in states’ discourse on upholding the universal principles of the Beijing Declaration – with some playing scant attention to lead policy issues such as gender-based violence.

Overall, the data show that equality was the dominant frame; accounting for just over a quarter (26.3 per cent) of all quasi-sentences (N=7,896) (Figure 2). Notably, a third of states refer to a basic Aristotelian equal treatment approach to gender in their programmes (e.g. ‘The National values and principles of governance include... equal treatment and equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres...’ Kenya 2014, 39). As noted, a concern emerging from the analysis is the potential for states to over-rely on equal treatment and affirmative action, for - as an extensive literature attests (Rees 1998, Bagilhole 2009), whilst these may secure short-term gains, they fail to address the underlying structural and cultural causes of inequality (they are also at odds with the ethos of mainstreaming). A further issue is the scant attention paid to intersectionality in the government discourse. In other words, the intersection of two or more axes of inequality or discrimination (e.g. gender and disability; gender and ethnicity, etc.) (cf. Crenshaw 2000). This is notwithstanding the fact that the BDPfA is explicit in the need for such an approach to gender-based reforms: ‘governments [must] affirm their determination to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are indigenous people’ (United Nations 1995). The associated danger of the limited attention to multiple and simultaneous identities in both state and CSO discourse is that civil activism itself becomes unrepresentative and at worst, an exclusive process. It is a scenario captured by Seidman’s (2001, 236) observation in relation to gender and class in South Africa: ‘CSO professionals, black and white, who have generally articulated feminist issues are almost entirely urban and middle class’

A further concern attaches to political elites’ use of the second-ranked frame, ‘rights’ (24.7 per cent of quasi-sentences). Here existing work draws a distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’

equality rights (cf. Cole, 2009). The former are legally enshrined and enforceable (e.g. 'the Office of the Ombudsman and the National Human Rights Commission are other monitoring and accountability mechanisms that follow up the respect, promotion and protection of human rights, including women's rights', Rwanda 2014, 5), the latter are discursive and symbolic. Thus, they 'may have no legally binding force but may nevertheless have practical effects... [constituting part of a] potentially important normative system employ[ing] non-binding objectives and guidelines to bring about change in social policy and other areas' (Trubek and Trubek 2005, 343). The problem with the state discourse is its over-emphasis on such imprecise 'soft' rights. For example: encouraging 'members of the community to identify women's economic and social rights... and thus improve their positions' (Sudan 2014, 34). In turn, this may lead to significant wells of CSO mistrust of official state discourse - and fuel an unmet demand for a shift in the power balance between government elites and citizenry. It is a point consistent with existing work on how 'a rights framework creates the space for civil society action to engage with legislatures to hold public officials accountable... enabling civil society mobilization, [and] reinforcing community agency' (London and Schneider 2012, 6).

The predominant usage of the third frame 'empowerment' (14.3 per cent of quasi-sentences) broadly elides with the notion of *political* empowerment (Sorensen 1997). A further strand is concerned with 'psychological empowerment' (cf. Kuokkanen and Leino-Kilpi 2000) – or, addressing how certain groups and identities are in a subordinate position to elites. It involves a response whereby citizens take responsibility for their actions, clarify their values, and improve their skills. Axiomatically, such empowerment is seen to come from the individual yet, crucially, it is also encouraged or suppressed by wider organisational and governance factors - as well as political practices. Examples of this discourse include, 'advocacy and awareness creation programmes... Women's Initiative for Self-empowerment through the use local languages and channels' (Ghana 2014, 39).

[Temporary Note – Figure 2. – about here]

When the two reviews (2005 and 2014/15) are compared the biggest shifts are an increase in framing around ‘empowerment’ (+9.1 percentage points) and ‘equality’ (+7.9 percentage points) – with attendant falls in framing on ‘participation’ (-7.0 percentage points), and ‘partnership working’ between CSOs and the state (-4.9 percentage points). From a normative perspective this change in emphasis might be viewed as a positive signal that latterly the promotion of gender equality is less of a state and more of a citizen-oriented ‘project’. However, the framing shift downplaying ‘participation’ is a concern because – as range of reports underline (African Union 2009a, 2009b), states are presently far from a situation whereby the underlying structural and cultural causes of gender inequality have been addressed. In consequence, grassroots engagement in the work of government is crucial to accountability and future progress in implementing the BDPfA. The decline in emphasis of citizen participation seen over the past decade is likely to exacerbate rather than reduce gender-based inequalities. This can usefully be conceptualised using Himmelman’s (1996) work on empowerment theory. The current analysis shows the predominance of an inferior state-led approach (captured by the term ‘collaborative betterment’), rather than ‘collaborative empowerment’. The latter describes a situation aspired to in the democratic-participative model of mainstreaming. One where democratic accountability is bolstered through recognition that the state alone cannot address gender inequality (Moser and Moser 2005).

The data also reveal statistically significant regional contrasts in the policy framing of states’ Beijing +10 and +20 Reviews. In the case of Southern Africa, it is a region characterised by major economic imbalances among the constituent states, not least because of the dominance of the



South African economy. Against this backdrop, as Soko (2007, 2) observes, the key to socio-economic development in the region is 'whether South Africa can balance the country's regional obligations against domestic pressures; [these include how] the country deals with the legacy of apartheid, [as well as,] South Africa's historical destabilisation of the region; and the degree to which the country's leadership credentials are accepted by other regional states'. The analysis reveals that Southern African states place greatest emphasis on 'equality' in their Beijing Review discourse. The frame accounts for 30.8 per cent of the regional discourse (compared to a mean of 20.2 percent across remaining regions,  $P < 0.001$ ).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, East and Southern African states place significantly less emphasis on 'participation' in their discourse, with a mean of 15.2 per cent of all quasi-sentences (compared to 20.3 per cent across other regions,  $P < 0.001$ ).<sup>3</sup> The latter finding is deeply worrying for it runs contrary to the conclusions of recent analysis of the political economy of East Africa. In response to the question, 'how to achieve reforms against the odds'? this concluded: 'the key is to empower local reformers [... they] can facilitate unlikely alliances and exploit uncertainties, time horizons and mixed motives to achieve reforms that have proven completely intractable by other means. Their activities take place, to some extent, under the radar of formal politics and policy-making' (Booth et al, 2014, 90).

In the North African states, against the turbulent backdrop of the Arab Spring, contemporary political economy paints a bleak picture. Inter alia, it is one of: continuing uncertainties and tensions; a region where rights and social protection needs to be targeted and embedded, and where 'measures to reduce corruption and promote greater transparency in the short term could play an important role in strengthening the credibility of reform efforts in the eyes of citizens' (Quilter-Pinner and Symons, 2014, 4). It is in this context that analysis shows that these Northern states place greater emphasis on discrimination and oppression (accounting for 9.2 per cent of all quasi-sentences compared to a mean of 5.8 per cent across the other regions).<sup>4</sup> Overall, such regional variations underline the historically contingent nature of the post-Beijing policy discourse and, as in

the latter case, reflect the ebb and flow of democracy, as well as the faltering development of legal codes and adoption of social practices consonant with the principles of the BDPfA.

[Temporary Note – Figure 3.]

When the main policy areas identified in governments’ Beijing \*10 and \*20 reviews are considered, the principal topics are: ‘raising children/ family life’ (23.1 per cent), education (22.3 per cent), health (18.2 per cent), tackling gender based violence (GBV) (15.2 per cent), and gender and economic inequality (12.1 per cent) (Figure 3) (N=11,995). The prioritization of GBV is consonant with UNECA’s invocation (2010, 28) to ‘adopt and implement a multi-sectoral plan to address gender-based violence... underpinned by the following actions... partnership with civil society’. However, a key issue that emerges from the data is the variation in the coverage of this issue in state reports; whilst the majority identify it in the top three policy issues, some (e.g. Eritrea) afford it scant attention.<sup>5</sup>

Of foremost concern when the 2005 and 2014/5 reviews are compared is the fall in the attention to gender and economic inequality (-11.0 percentage points). This is not only because it coincides with the global recession, but because of the way it impacts on other policy areas such as health and child/ family wellbeing. It also signals a failure on the part of state parties to heed the UN’s earlier assessment that states: ‘failed to highlight the roles of development partners and civil society organisations in poverty eradication initiatives and how such actions are being coordinated with the object of achieving maximum benefits to target groups’ (UN 2010, 27).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it shows a troubling lack of progress since a 2009 UNECA report concluded, ‘governments need to sharpen their approaches to poverty reduction and elimination by taking account of its gendered impacts and

dimensions. So far, there is no evidence to show that existing policies and strategies have curbed the feminization of poverty in Africa' (UNECA 2009a, 3).

There are also statistically-significant regional variations in the attention paid to policy areas in states' reports. The origins of these spatial patterns lie in the differential welfare regimes across the continent, as well as diverging legal rights and entitlements. For example, there is markedly less attention to education in Southern countries' reports (19.2 per cent of quasi-sentences compared to a mean of 26.5 per cent of across remaining regions) ( $P < 0.001$ )<sup>7</sup> – as well as comparatively less attention to health in northern states' (13.4 per cent of quasi-sentences compared to a mean of 18 per cent across remaining regions) ( $P < 0.001$ ). Moreover, there is greater emphasis on GBV in the reports of the Southern African countries (mean of 16.4 per cent of quasi-sentences compared to 12.7 per cent across remaining regions) ( $P < 0.001$ ).<sup>8</sup>

[Temporary Note – Figure 4. – about here]

### State Discourse on the role of civil society organisations

Analysis of the Beijing +10 and +20 National Reports reveals the principal frames in states' discourse describing the role of civil society organisations in implementing the BDPfA (Figure 4.). This is worthy of attention for it provides further evidence of whether political elites envision co-working with civil society to deliver Beijing objectives. Here the discourse espouses inclusive governance. Allied to the participative democratic model of mainstreaming, over a half (56.2 per cent) of all quasi-sentences are concerned with state-civil society engagement: either 'participation' in public decision-making and policy-making (35.8 per cent of quasi-sentences) or 'co-working/ partnership' with the state in the delivery of services (20.4 per cent). Examples of the former include: 'The Malawi Government recognises the essential role of civil society in the promotion of gender equality and women

empowerment. The Government has as much as possible created space for the effective participation of civil society organisations in the implementation of the BDPFA' (Malawi 2014, 10). Existing work underlines how such state-civil society co-working has the potential to deliver more effective services (cf. Sunanda et al 2012). Examples of this discourse includes: equality 'sensitization programs [in school curricula] for girls on life skills are done by the Government in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations' (Tanzania 2014, 30). The remaining principal frames were tackling gender based violence (9.0 per cent), training/ capacity building issues (6.4 per cent), CSOs' accountability/ monitoring role (6.0 per cent), promoting women's rights (5.4 per cent), and women's representation (3.8 per cent).

**Civil Society Organisations' Discourse on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2003-15**

Analysis of civil society organisations' 'post-Beijing' discourse 2003-14 reveals that the principal frame was 'rights' (Figure 5.).<sup>9</sup> This accounted for just over a third (33.9 per cent) of quasi-sentences. For example, 'two levels of approach are required, one long-term and the other more immediate... Comprehensive human rights educationally-based programs to address widespread violence against women and girls, supported by a legal framework which punishes this violence'.<sup>10</sup> This lends credence to the earlier conclusion about significant wells of *mistrust* between state and civil society. It is significant because it reveals the salience of social capital theory to contemporary attempts at mainstreaming gender equality in African states. Classically, this was elucidated in Putnam's work on Italy (Putnam 1993). Such work underlines how trust is a key component and predictor of citizen engagement in the work of government (Chaney 2002). It can be defined as a 'discrete form of human interaction and an ideal model of communal life' (Seligman 1997, 7). It is a resource that allows democracy to function properly for it shapes the propensity of individuals to participate in political or society-oriented associations and thus it, 'operates to link ordinary citizens to the

institutions that are intended to represent them thereby enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic government' (see Fennema and Tillie, 2000, 5). Its prominence in the African CSO discourse points to the largely under-explored issue of how widespread political corruption across African states (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006) acts as a brake on current international efforts to advance citizen rights by gender mainstreaming.

The second-ranked frame was 'equality' (28.5 per cent), followed by tackling discrimination and oppression' (10.9 per cent of the discourse). Examples include: 'Governments must invest significantly in public health and social care, including child and elderly care and public water and energy systems, as tools for achieving gender equality and mitigating the effects of the global economic crisis')<sup>11</sup> and, 'the Cameroonian Government... has also put in place a set of implementing measures to facilitate access by youth to education and training... All these efforts are practically for naught, however, and somewhat useless compared to what is needed'.<sup>12</sup> The significance of civil society organisations' accent on rights, equality and anti-discrimination (together constituting three-quarters of the discourse) is that it is a reflection of current shortcomings in legal protection extended to minorities and the exclusive and discriminatory nature of many state practices. It is view affirmed by the fourth-ranked frame, 'participation' (10.8 per cent). Here again, is evidence of a significant demand from the citizenry to challenge state practices and past failings. Examples of the latter discourse includes: government 'should ensure that women with disabilities are active participants in all development processes and programmes, including by holding key decision-making roles'.<sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein, 'empowerment' was the subject of 10.4 per cent of CSOs' quasi-sentences. For example, we have 'the following reservations... what is needed is social change and women's empowerment, regardless of where justice lies'.<sup>14</sup> The prominence of this frame also resonates with the wider literature on women's role in challenging state failings and exclusive practices. For example, as Olowu (2012, 110) observes, 'only when women as well as men at the grassroots level

are socially empowered to speak for themselves and thus own the gender equality project in such a way that oppressive patriarchal structures of traditional African societies are questioned openly'. Amongst the remaining frames it is also notable that CSOs generally eschew specific reference to 'mainstreaming'. The latter accounted for under one per cent of quasi-sentences overall. This is striking and suggests that CSOs generally lack both knowledge of the concept and/or are wary of what, as the present findings suggest, might be seen as co-option into a state-led agenda. Such a 'disconnect' is deeply problematic for, as Walby (2005, 332) explains, 'the level of sophistication of the gender equality awareness within the political environment affects whether state functionaries can effectively implement gender mainstreaming'.

[Temporary Note – Figures 5. and 6. – about here]

In the CSOs' discourse 'economic inequalities' was the lead policy issue (19.9 per cent, N= 3,457) (Figure 6). This was followed by education (18.2 per cent). Both are intimately related to the issue of gender equality in Africa states (cf. Karlsson, 2009). The emphasis on education reflects the fact that 'young women need... to both assess and inform policy around girls' education if the commitment to women's empowerment is genuine' (Jones 2011, 410-11). The third-ranked policy topic was 'peace/ conflict resolution' (18.1 per cent). As Colvin (2007, 334) notes, this stems from the fact that 'since women are often the most active and productive members of CSOs, their energy and skills... can be invaluable in promoting reconciliation. Prioritising women and children in the aftermath of conflict has, therefore, become an important principle of reconciliation work'. Subsequent topics were 'raising children/ family life' (13.3 per cent), GBV (12.4 per cent), 'health' (11.7 per cent), 'trafficking/ prostitution' (3.1 per cent), 'genital mutilation' (1.4 per cent), and 'property rights/ inheritance' (1.2 per cent).

### State-Civil Society 'Disjuncture'?

Complementarity theory emphasises how politicians attempt to cope with complexity by using civil society networks to increase involvement in policy formulation, thus not only strengthening input legitimacy but also policy efficacy through the pursuit of shared cognitive maps for action (or 'frame alignment'). Thus, in a normative sense, political elites' espousal of civil society engagement should achieve such complementarity effects through the application of the participative-democratic model of mainstreaming across African states. However, the following critical discourse analysis paints a different picture. It reveals statistically significant differences in states' and CSOs' framing ( $P < 0.001$ )<sup>15</sup> as well as contrasts in the level of attention paid to different policy areas/ issues ( $P < 0.001$ ).<sup>16</sup> Thus, for example, gender, poverty and economic inequality was the lead policy issue for CSOs, yet only fifth-ranked in the state reports (Table 1.). Further illustration of the state-CSO disjuncture is provided by framing data on gender and conflict resolution (cf. Chigudu 2006); it was the second-ranked frame by CSOs yet sixth ranked by states (18.3 per cent of quasi-sentences compared to 4.4 per cent) ( $P < 0.001$ ).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, analysis reveals a 9.2 percentage point difference in attention to rights.

[Temporary Note - Table 1 – about here]

A further, troubling disparity between state and civil society discourse is the differing emphasis (11.8 percentage points) on the related frames of 'participation' and 'mainstreaming'. This threatens the attainment of the sought-after participative-democratic model of mainstreaming. Thus the present findings give empirical backing to an earlier observation by the African Union:



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Whilst Africa has made good progress in improving governance; it also faces serious challenges... including the need to institute appropriate structures and mechanisms that consider active citizens’ participation, fostering gender equality, women’s empowerment, human rights and more active and meaningful participation of civil society in the development process (African Union 2009b, 77).

In social theory terms, this aspect of the findings resonates with the tension between legitimacy and legitimation. In the former regard, as Rawls (2003, 171) notes, ‘political legitimacy aims for a public basis of justification and appeals to free public reason, and hence to all citizens viewed as reasonable and rational’. In contrast, ‘legitimation involves communicative actions aimed at managing the public’s perception that government actions are effective in promoting their desired ends, whether that is in fact true’ (Moore 2001, 712). The current data point more to the latter scenario. Indeed, they hint at performativity on the part of some states who have failed to fully commit to the mainstreaming requirements of the BDPfA. Instead, their national Beijing reports can be seen as largely bureaucratic exercises, unreflective of thoroughgoing programmes of gender equality reform. In colloquial terms, this perfunctory regard for the BDPfA can be styled as “going through the motions”. In other words, giving the appearance of compliance with the UN’s mainstreaming goals whilst failing to marshal the necessary resources and political capital to secure effective progress. It is a situation captured by theory on ‘performativity’ in policy-making. As Price and Shildrick (1999, 241) explain, ‘performativity is... not a singular act for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition’.

The foregoing state-CSO disjuncture is significant because, in governance-theory terms, it is contrary to the notion of complementarity which asserts: ‘governance networks when predicated on the basis of deliberative and other democratic practices... engender both a democratic ethos and

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3 *consensual decision-outcomes* that transcend and *accommodate partial preferences*' (Klijn and  
4 Skelcher, 2008, p.16, emphasis added). Instead, frame di-alignment in the study data show that  
5 government is prioritizing aspects of policy and framing issues of gender equality in ways that  
6 contrast with the discourse of civil society organisations. In short, notwithstanding civil society input,  
7 government is following a different cognitive map for action in pursuing the gender mainstreaming  
8 goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.  
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## 19 Conclusion

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22 The significance of this study lies in showing how, whilst mainstreaming represents a generational  
23 opportunity to apply Feminist Political Economic Framework to development in Africa, current  
24 practice falls short of the sought-after participative democratic model of gender mainstreaming. This  
25 is contrary to the situation predicted by the 'complementarity conjecture' in governance theory. This  
26 describes how politicians attempt to cope with complexity by engaging civil society in policy  
27 formulation. Yet, in the African states studied here, instead of strengthening input legitimacy and  
28 policy efficacy, the findings reveal statistically-significant differences in state and CSOs' framing – as  
29 well as issues over conceptual clarity and a disjuncture in the prioritization of key gendered issues  
30 such as poverty, economic inequality and conflict resolution.  
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42 A further concern emerging from the present analysis is that attempts at gender  
43 mainstreaming in African states continue to reproduce and replicate known difficulties in translating  
44 principles into outcomes (True and Parisi 2013). In particular, problems exist in fostering a  
45 participatory approach that is genuinely democratic and engages a wide range of exogenous groups  
46 in mainstreaming equality into the work of government. In this regard, the current data suggest  
47 limited progress since Beijing +15, when a UN appraisal concluded that 'many gaps and challenges  
48 remain in guaranteeing... full and equal participation in decision-making in all stages' (UN 2010, 37).  
49 In the majority of cases African states are applying an expert bureaucratic model of mainstreaming;  
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this is principally founded on the input of state policy elites and gender experts as opposed to broad-based civil society engagement. This is deeply problematic for realisation of BDPfA objectives because, as Beall (2001, 144) notes:

advancing gender equality demands striking a balance between the essentially political project of ensuring women’s social and economic participation and political representation, and the more technical project of institutionalizing or mainstreaming a gender perspective in policy and practice... it is essential that the national machinery for the advancement of gender equality ... does not forget its foundation in civil society, and that there is an on-going commitment to ‘doing gender’ from bottom to top, as well as from top to bottom.

The present analysis also points to future avenues for research which may build on the issues and findings outlined here. Thus, to complement the foregoing international comparative discourse analysis of the implementation of the BDPfA, a series of case studies examining policy and practice in individual African nations would further inform understanding of the contingent effects of state histories (*inter alia*, legacy of conflict, democratic maturity, level of indebtedness, dependency and foreign- relations etc.). In addition, future work might usefully undertake ethnographic work exploring the perspective of different civil society organisations as they seek to influence the post-Beijing agenda through engagement with policy elites. Such research could explore the relative impact of contrasting action repertoires (or, means of policy engagement) – ranging from standard policy responses and monitoring reports submitted to the UN, to lobbying, mobilisation, campaigning and protest – and how these ‘play out’ across different types of organisational context (from donor-dependent NGOs to social movements). In addition, such CSO-based work might explore the degree to which CSOs’ review reports reflect actual behaviour on the ground, particularly in the context of the donor-led consultancy environment in which they operate.

This study also has clear implications for a range of policy actors. For government it underlines the need for responsive implementation strategies that ensure compatibility with the policy priorities of civil society organisations. In turn, for CSOs it highlights the need for adaptive action repertoires such that their policy priorities are heard by political elites. Moreover, for global agencies such as UN Women it points to the need for ongoing, real-time country-based reflexive monitoring of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (rather than a five-yearly census approach) – as well as more effective sanctions for states' non-compliance.

In summary, this paper's wider contribution to the literature on gender and development is in providing a transferable comparative methodology whereby government actions can be assessed in the context of civil society policy demands. Its key finding is that, contrary to the UN goal of participative democratic mainstreaming, across African states divergence in government and civil society policy framing and issue prioritization diminishes the capacity of the civil sphere to act as a political arena from whence NGOs may challenge the traditionally male-dominated power structures of state and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Nvivo 10.

<sup>2</sup>  $\chi^2 = 164.5$ ,  $df = 18$ ,  $P = 0.0027391$

<sup>3</sup>  $\chi^2 = 194.338$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P = 0.001562$

<sup>4</sup>  $\chi^2 = 148.667$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P = 0.004511$

<sup>5</sup> 7 references to violence against women, 4 to abuse.

<sup>6</sup> Fifteen-Year Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Africa – Beijing+ 15

<sup>7</sup>  $\chi^2 = 355.094$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P = 0.077495$

<sup>8</sup>  $\chi^2 = 368.259$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P = 0.22187$

<sup>9</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>10</sup> Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Society for Women and AIDS in Africa et al (2009) Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women, Ref. E/CN.6/2009/NGO/21.

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2-13 March 2009

<sup>11</sup> Statement by Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. E/CN.6/2010/NGO/14

<sup>12</sup> Statement submitted by African Women's Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Ref. E/CN.6/2011/NGO/77

<sup>13</sup> Statement by Disabled Peoples' International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Ref. E/CN.6/2010/NGO/32

<sup>14</sup> Statement submitted by Africa Muslims Agency and Muslim World League, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council et al (2004), p.4. Ref. E/CN.6/2004/NGO/36

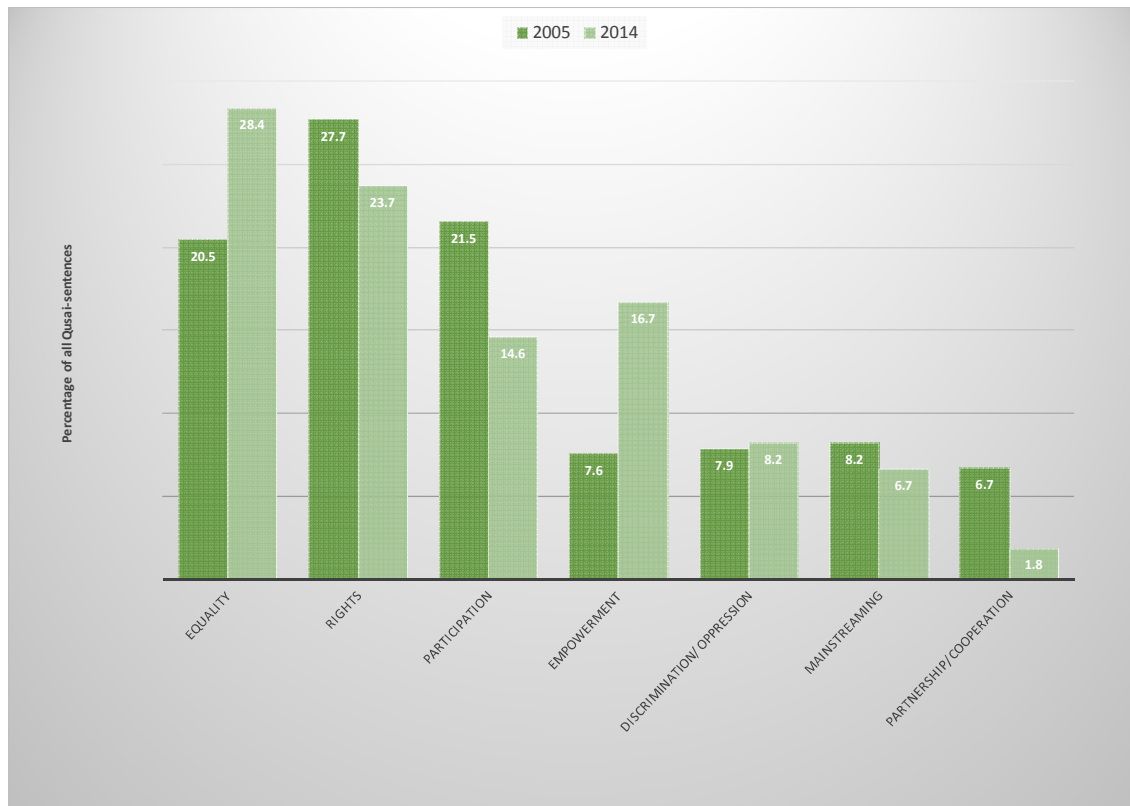
<sup>15</sup>  $\chi^2 = 249.659$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $P = <0.0001$

<sup>16</sup>  $\chi^2 = 1066.784$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $P = <0.0001$

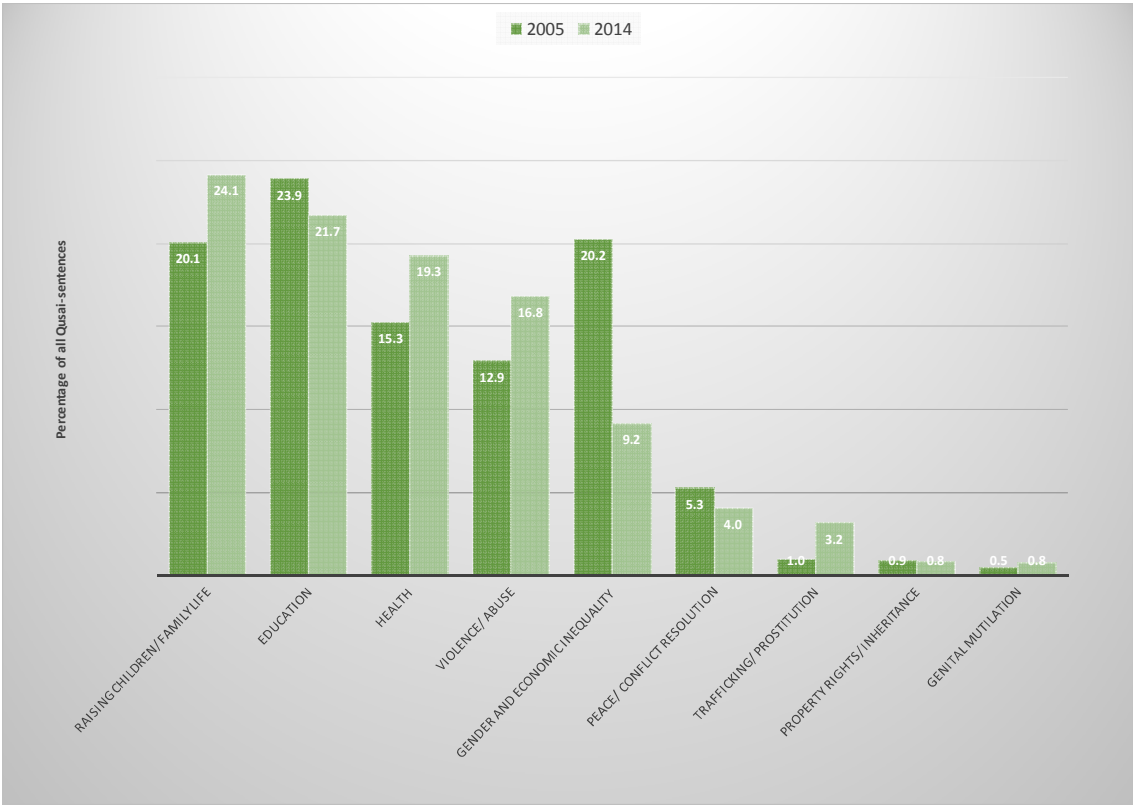
<sup>17</sup>  $\chi^2 = 154.74$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P = <0.0001$

FPE Values (after Riley, 2008)	Gender Mainstreaming Principles (After Rees, 2005)	Gender Mainstreaming Frames (After Chaney, 2015)
Human well-being is the foundational value; gender equality is central to human well-being;	‘Regarding the individual as a whole person means stripping away sex-stereotypical assumptions about gender roles... also means that men and women should be afforded equal status and therefore careful attention needs to be paid to the issue of the dignity of the individual’.	Education; Health; Tackling Gender-based violence; Trafficking/ prostitution; Genital mutilation
Human rights, especially economic and social rights;	‘It means treating people as individuals, rather than necessarily typical of their sex. It means addressing differences between men and women while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of biological essentialism. Tools to deliver on this principle include, then, work/life balance policies, dignity at work policies, the modernisation of human resource management, enhancing transparency and openness... respecting human rights’.	Rights; Inheritance rights; right to Education; equality
Women’s personal autonomy within relationships of reciprocity;	‘Seeking to identify how existing systems and structures, however inadvertently, may be androcentric in terms of their design and who benefits. Rules and practices need to be changed in order not just to provide equality of opportunity but to foster equality of outcome’.	Equality; Empowerment;
Women’s moral and political agency;	‘Democracy and participation are also part of the package of values underlying... gender mainstreaming [specifically] ‘Representation’. This is a concern with issue of gender balance in decision making and consultation/civic participation’.	Participation; Equality; Empowerment Partnership/ cooperation
Recognition and valuation of women’s work of social reproduction—a value and an activity;	‘Implies, for example, that family-friendly policies are needed for all employees, rather than being aimed specifically at women or provided for those in feminised occupations. This principle goes beyond the individual as a carer needing family-friendly policies to other non-work related time demands on individuals’.	Raising children/ Family life; Economic inequalities; Empowerment;
Embracing differences and eliminating discrimination—racial, ethnic, sexual preferences, class/caste, religious and national origin;	‘this principle accepts difference and as such avoids some of the limitations of the equal treatment approach while seeking to ensure that women and men are treated equally... regarding the individual as a whole person means challenging stereotypical assumptions and embracing difference, as an employer and as a deliverer of goods or services. It means treating people as individuals, rather than necessarily typical of their sex’.	Discrimination/ oppression; Peace/ conflict resolution;

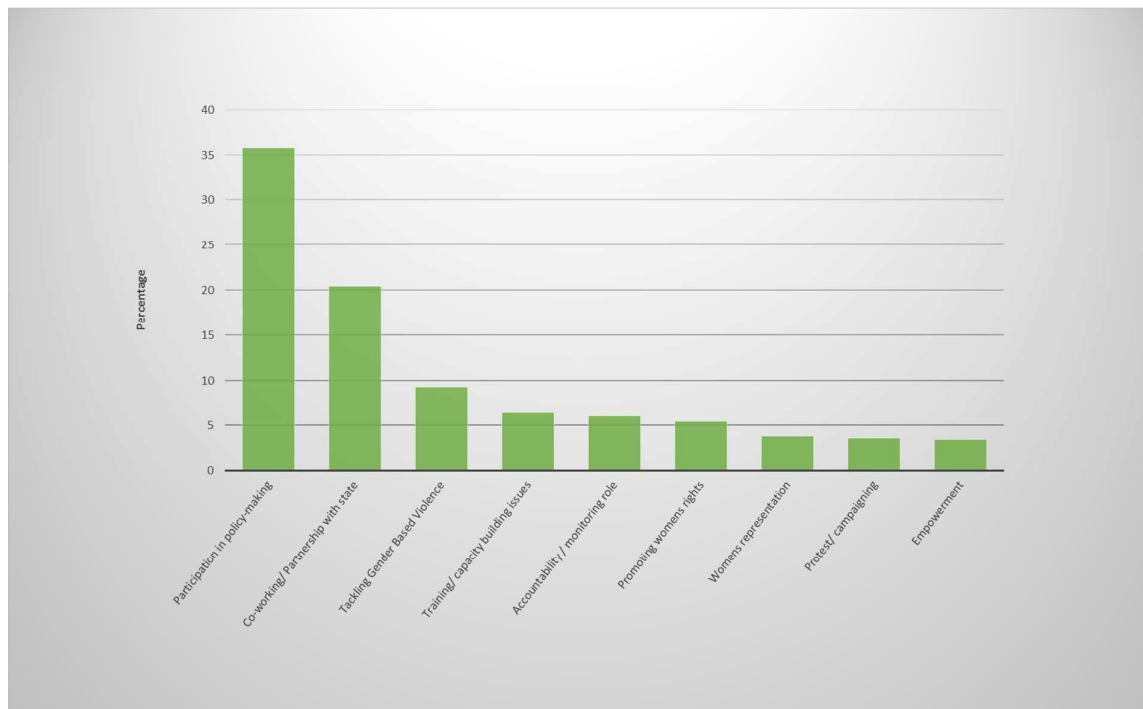
Figure 1. Feminist Political Economy Values and Gender Mainstreaming Principles/ Policy Frames.



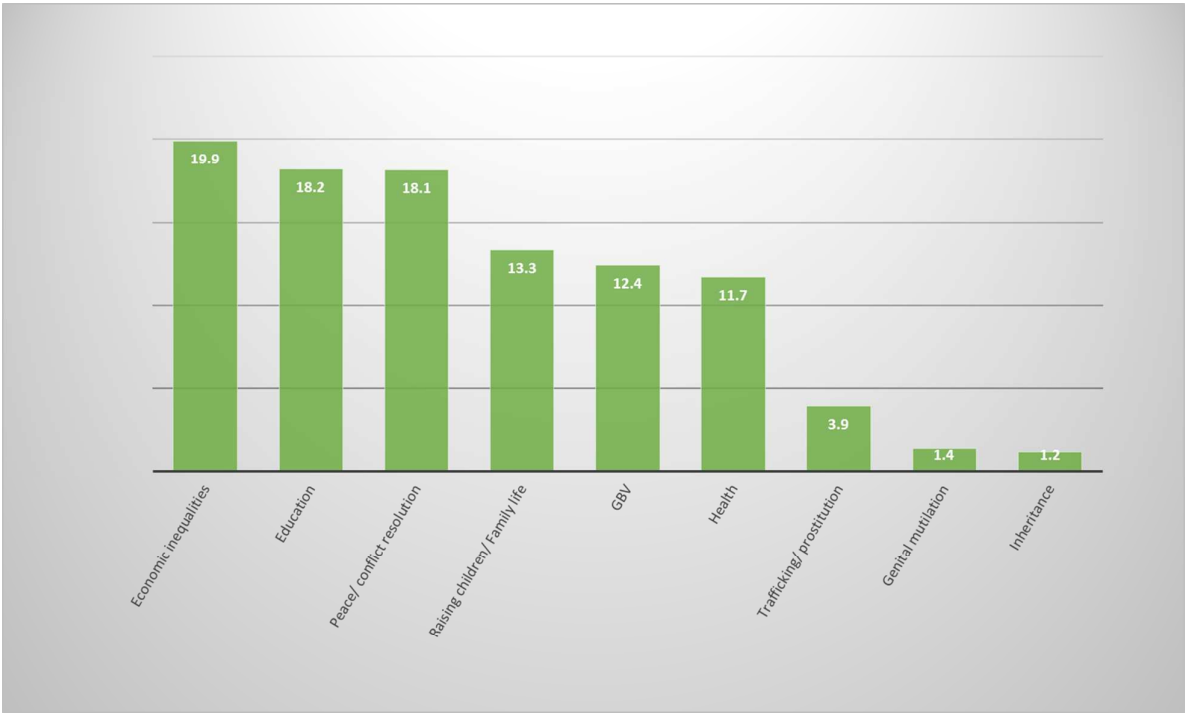
**Figure 2. Principal Frames in State Parties' Beijing +10 and +20 Reviews** (Percentage of all quasi-sentences in each review, N=7,896)



**Figure 3. Salience of Policy Areas in State Parties' Beijing +10 and +20 Reviews** (Percentage of all quasi-sentences in each review, N=11,995)



**Figure 4. State Parties' Framing of the Role of Civil Society in Implementing the BDPfA** (Percentage of Quasi-sentences by Frame in Beijing +10 and +20 Reviews, N= 793)



**Figure 6 Civil Society Organisations' Discourse on the implementation of the BDPfA 2003-14: Policy areas/ issues (N= 3,457)**

	Percentage all Quasi-sentences		Ranking	
	State	CSO	State	CSO
<b>FRAMES</b>				
Equality	26.3	28.5	1	2
Rights	24.7	33.9	2	1
Participation	16.4	10.8	3	4
Empowerment	14.3	10.4	4	5
Discrimination/ oppression	8.1	10.9	5	3
Mainstreaming	7.1	0.9	6	7
Partnership/ cooperation	3.1	4.7	7	6
<b>POLICY AREAS/ ISSUES</b>				
Raising children/ Family life	23.1	13.3	1	4
Education	22.3	18.2	2	3
Health	18.2	11.7	3	6
Violence/ abuse	15.8	12.4	4	5
Gender and economic inequality	12.1	19.9	5	1
Peace/ conflict resolution	4.4	18.3	6	2
Trafficking/ prostitution	2.6	3.9	7	7
Property Rights/ Inheritance	0.9	1.2	8	8
Genital mutilation	0.7	1.3	9	9

**Table 1. Percentage and Ranking of Frames and Policy areas/ issues in State and CSO BDPfA discourse (2003-14).**